

THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF  
ST. AUGUSTINE'S  
*DE CIVITATE DEI*

By  
NORMAN H. BAYNES

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## THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF ST. AUGUSTINE'S *DE CIVITATE DEI*

[THIS essay was written to form one of a series of lectures on Social and Political Ideals which was arranged by the South-West London Branch of the Association. The Branch suggested the subject, and the lecture was designed to form an introduction to the study of the modern literature on the subject. It raises no claim to originality.<sup>1</sup>]

It might perhaps be questioned whether the *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine's vast work – he himself called it an *ingens opus* – can rightly claim a place in a series of lectures devoted to the study of political and social ideals: it is primarily concerned neither with politics nor social ideals. It is designed as a defence of the Christian religion; it is the last and the greatest of the Apologies for Christianity produced by the early Church. But from the *De Civitate Dei* the Middle Ages did undoubtedly derive political doctrine: sentences from Augustine became the slogans of contending parties or were used as brickbats with which to lay low political opponents. Here we are rather concerned with Augustine's own thought, and not with the interpretations put upon it by later generations. And it must always be remembered that the composition of the *De Civitate Dei* occupied Augustine during some thirteen years, that it was published in parts and could not, in consequence, be revised as a whole when the work was completed. Augustine was never a systematic thinker: he did not sit down in cold blood to compose a philosophic treatise. He reacted to an external stimulus, and his writings are answers to provocations which came to him from without. Upon him as a bishop devolved the care of the churches, the problems of education, of protection of his Christian flock from tyranny or oppression, of the defence of the faith alike against heresy and schism. He was no recluse working in the calm of his study: he wrote the *De Civitate Dei* in moments snatched from countless distractions; the work was undertaken in answer to a definite challenge – the capture of Rome by Alaric the Goth in A.D. 410 – but through the years it grew under his hands, often the scheme with which he started it is lost to sight, and with difficulty he returns

<sup>1</sup> I desire to thank Dr. E. Langstadt for help given in talks with him.

to that scheme, escaping from a digression which has for the time being absorbed his interest. The audience to which the work was addressed was very varied; pagans to be attacked, Christians to be strengthened in their faith: uneducated folk, and philosophers prepared to follow highly abstract arguments; different parts of the work are on very different levels of thought. All this must be remembered by the modern reader. The study of the *De Civitate Dei* can never be an easy undertaking.<sup>1</sup>

There is no need to speak here of Augustine's life or of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. To the last great persecution of the Christians by the Roman State Constantine had put an end. He had adopted for himself the Christian faith, and, though he could not make it the religion of the Roman State, he could throw his influence into the Christian scale. And he could educate his sons as Christians. The reaction of Julian was short-lived, and the imperial power passed once more into Christian hands, until towards the close of the fourth century Theodosius the Great was free to proclaim Christianity as the religion of an orthodox Roman State. Augustine was born half way through the fourth century, in the year 354, in Tagaste, a small town in the Roman province of Africa: his mother Monica was a Christian, his father a pagan. From Tagaste he moved to Madaura for his schooling, and thence, after an interval, to the University of Carthage. Here he taught rhetoric until he left Africa for Rome: it was at Milan, the city of Ambrose, that he was converted. He returned to Africa where, as priest and bishop, he spent his life. The North African church was rent by schism; the Donatists – so-called from the founder of the schism, Donatus – contended that they alone formed the true Church of Christ. Caecilian, the Catholic bishop of Carthage, had, they said, been consecrated by a *traditor* – by one who had given up the sacred scriptures to the State authorities in the great persecution. From a church thus dishonoured the Donatists withdrew, and despite persuasion and persecution persisted in their schism. Augustine was unwearied in his championship of the Church Catholic, in his efforts to constrain the Donatists to re-enter the Catholic communion.<sup>2</sup> From the Christian teaching of his childhood Augustine had passed through the period of the sowing of his wild oats; his first conversion had come through the reading of Cicero's lost work, the *Hortensius* – a conversion to philosophy; then he was attracted for a time by the dualistic religion of the Manichaeans,<sup>3</sup> and, disappointed there, lapsed into scepticism, until, through Neoplatonism he returned to his mother's faith and

<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the *De Civitate Dei*, see Joseph Rickaby, *St. Augustine's City of God* (Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1925).

<sup>2</sup> On Donatism, cf. Paul Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne*, vol. iv. (Paris, Leroux, 1912).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. F. C. Burkitt, *The Religion of the Manichees* (Cambridge University Press, 1925).

to the defence of the Church Catholic. Augustine knew both worlds – the pagan as well as the Christian.

When Rome, the eternal city, the centre of the civilised universe – of the *οἰκουμένη* – fell before the Goth, it seemed at first the death-blow to civilisation itself. Why, men asked, had this devastating catastrophe occurred in their day? Through the centuries, from the Republican period onwards, the Romans had attributed the growth of Rome and the victorious expansion of Roman power to their fidelity to their national gods, their scrupulous observance of the pagan cult. This disaster, men concluded, must be due to the wrath of the gods angered by the neglect of their worship under a Christian State. The Christians were responsible for the fall of the city which had unified the Mediterranean world. This was the challenge to which the *De Civitate Dei* was designed as an answer: the gods of polytheism had not caused the greatness of Rome, they were powerless to bring happiness to men either in this world or the next. Thus the first part of the work is negative in its general argument. From controverting the pagans Augustine turns in the second part to his positive contention: he contrasts the two *civitates* – the *civitas* of God and the *civitas* of the Devil. Through a study of the history of these two *civitates* Christianity is justified as the sole source of blessedness.

Now in the meaning which Augustine gives to the word *civitas* he is not consistent – it can mean ‘city,’ in a few instances it is employed in the signification of our word ‘State,’ but students are now, it would seem, agreed that neither word adequately represents Augustine’s fundamental conception; that is best rendered by some such word as ‘society’: it is the history of two communities which is the theme of his work. And neither of those communities is fully incorporated in any earthly society, for the angels and the saints form part of the *civitas Dei*, while the demons are members of the *civitas Diaboli*. Primarily the use of the term *civitas* is allegorical – it is used, as Augustine himself would say, ‘*mystice*.’ When Augustine is expounding the *theory* of his conception of history the *civitas terrena* – the society of earth – is not the State: the *civitas caelestis*, the heavenly society, is not the Church, but when he comes to consider the *representatives* of these two societies on earth – when he is treating the matter, not purely theoretically, but empirically – then the Roman State comes to be regarded as the earthly *civitas*, and the Church as the divine society. Thus the Middle Ages could see in the two societies the State and the Church.

The conception of the two ‘cities’ comes ultimately from the Bible: Jerusalem, the holy city, is contrasted with Babylon: but, more directly, modern research has tended to show, Augustine derived his theme from Ticonius, the Donatist, who in his work on the Apocalypse had interpreted the Book of Revelation on similar lines. Here the two *civitates* – the *civitas* of God and the *civitas* of

the Devil – are contrasted. The latter seeks to serve the world, the former to serve Christ: one desires to rule in this world, the other to flee from this world; one slays, the other is slain; one labours for damnation, the other for salvation. It is thus from the schismatic that Augustine would seem to have borrowed the great contrast on which his work is founded. The *civitas* of Faith is opposed to the *civitas* of Un-faith – Belief ranged against Unbelief. The city of Heaven is characterised by humility and obedience – the city of earth by pride and lust of rule. In his preface, Augustine quotes the text ‘God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.’<sup>1</sup> It is the contrast between *superbia* and *humilitas*, between the flesh and the spirit.

Between the flesh and the spirit – this is the great opposition which dominates the thought of Augustine, because the struggle between the flesh and the spirit had dominated his own life. Readers of the *Confessions* will remember the agonies of that search for truth and the despair from which he was only freed by his submission to the authority of the Church. Not through reason, but through revelation: it was God’s grace that had brought the solution: it was no human achievement. And thus throughout Augustine’s thought there runs this dualism – the powerlessness and the sin of man: the irresistible grace and mercy of God. Here is the root of Augustine’s profound pessimism concerning man and human life and human character. Misery and mortality are the lot of man on earth. ‘All men, so long as they are mortal, must of necessity be miserable.’ ‘What river of eloquence could ever suffice to set forth the wretchedness of this life?’ The only thing that counts for man in this life is his relation to God: what matters it under what form of government a man lives – man with his brief life, man under the doom of death – provided only that he may serve his God? ‘It is a man’s character,’ says Fichte, ‘which determines his philosophy’: it was Augustine’s own experience which determined the thought of the *De Civitate Dei*. Two loves formed two cities: the earthly city was formed by love of self leading to contempt of God, the heavenly city was formed by love of God leading to contempt of self. Therefore the one glories in itself, the other in God.

It is not that social life is inherently an evil: God designed man to be a social being. In Paradise he fashioned man and gave to him as helpmate a woman; in that human pair was the faculty of generation of other humans – here lay the germ of family life, itself the cell of every wider association. And generation, as God intended it, was a pure act of untroubled will: it was man’s misuse of his free will which brought about the Fall, which gave birth to sin, which gave rise to passion in the act of human generation, which laid upon man the curse of Adam, the burden of inherited sin. The Fall vitiated that social life of free intercourse for which

<sup>1</sup> I Peter v. 5, cf. James iv. 6.



an was created; the State, or the City, was founded by Cain, the  
 murderer of his brother, and the subjection of man by man is the  
 bitter fruit of Adam's sin, just as the institution of slavery is itself  
 another fruit of sin. And Augustine's theory of the State is essentially  
 individualistic: the State is not for him an entity in itself: the  
 State is the human beings of which it is composed, its character is  
 determined by the character of its citizens: if there is no justice in  
 the individuals who make up the State, without doubt there can be  
 no justice in the State itself. This is the background which one  
 must have in mind as one approaches the discussion in the *De  
 Civitate Dei* of the true definition of the State. Augustine takes  
 Cicero's definition of the republic – the State: 'an assemblage  
 associated by a common acknowledgment of right and by a com-  
 munity of interests,' and proceeds, 'and what Cicero means by a  
 common acknowledgment of right he explains at large, showing  
 that a republic cannot be administered without justice. When  
 therefore there is no true justice there can be no right,' and therefore  
 there is no republic where there is no justice. Justice is that virtue  
 which gives to every man his due. But, as we have seen, for  
 Augustine, man's end is the worship of the true God: where then  
 is the justice of man when he deserts the true God and yields him-  
 self to impure demons? Is this to give every one his due? Or is  
 he who keeps back a piece of ground from the purchaser and gives  
 it to a man who has no right to it unjust, while he who keeps back  
 himself from the God who made him and serves wicked spirits is  
 just? Augustine thus finds himself placed before the alternative of  
 denying that the State of Rome was a republic at all or of omitting  
 justice from the definition of the State. He chooses the latter  
 alternative, and puts forward a definition of his own: 'a State is  
 an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common  
 agreement concerning the objects of their love.' Pause for a  
 moment and consider the effect of this discussion upon Augustine's  
 view of the character of a State. There was in the early Church  
 a strong tradition that the maintenance of justice was an essential  
 part of the purpose of the State: St. Paul had urged obedience to  
 the State upon the ground that the State rewards the good and  
 punishes the evil. Clement of Alexandria had defined a king as  
 one who rules according to law, while Ambrose, Augustine's own  
 master, had contended that justice and beneficence are the essential  
 virtues for any community: justice – *aequitas* – is the strength of the  
 State and injustice spells its dissolution. There have been attempts  
 made to show that Augustine does not really mean to exclude justice  
 from the definition of the State – he is speaking here, it is urged, of  
 divine justice: human – natural – justice remains in the State. Mr.  
 Carlyle quotes the famous saying of Augustine, 'Set justice aside,  
 and what are kingdoms but great robberies?'<sup>1</sup> and considers the  
 meaning of the saying to be that the only point of distinction

<sup>1</sup> Remota iustitia quid regna nisi magna latrocinia. *De Civitate Dei* iv, ch. 4.

between a band of robbers and a kingdom is that the latter has the quality of justice. But as Mr. Christopher Dawson has written: 'the actual tendency of the passage appears to be quite the contrary. St. Augustine is arguing that there is no difference between the conqueror and the robber except the scale of their operations, for he continues, "What is banditry but a little kingdom?" and he approves the reply of the pirate to Alexander the Great, "Because I do it with a little ship, I am called a robber, and you, because you do it with a great fleet, are called an emperor."<sup>1</sup> There cannot be much doubt that Augustine meant what he said. 'If he did, I cannot but feel,' says Mr. Carlyle, 'that it was a deplorable error for a great Christian teacher.' But, after all, Augustine's conclusions follow naturally from the premises which we have already considered. And Augustine's view was echoed with great vigour by Cardinal Newman:<sup>2</sup> 'Earthly kingdoms are founded, not in justice, but in injustice. They are created by the sword, by robbery, cruelty, perjury, craft and fraud. There never was a kingdom, except Christ's, which was not conceived and born, nurtured and educated, in sin. There never was a State, but was committed to acts and maxims, which it is its crime to maintain and its ruin to abandon. What monarchy is there but began in invasion or usurpation? What revolution has been effected without self-will, violence or hypocrisy? What popular Government but is blown about by every wind as if it had no conscience and no responsibilities? What dominion of the few but is selfish and unscrupulous? Where is military strength without the passion for war? Where is trade without the love of filthy lucre, which is the root of all evil?' It is a pessimism as profound as Augustine's own.

But even if the earthly State cannot claim justice as its prerogative, even though it was founded by a murderer and is vitiated from the first by the inheritance of the sin of Adam, still the State is part of the divine Providence and rulers are chosen by God and ordained by Him. Here the early Church had adopted the Jewish view of earthly authority which it found in the Old Testament. It was not only the kings who worshipped Jehovah who owed to Him their thrones: pagan monarchs who persecuted the followers of Jehovah were appointed by Him: Daniel, speaking to Nebuchadnezzar, can say, 'Thou, O King, art king of kings, unto whom the God of Heaven hath given the kingdom, the power and the strength and the glory' (Daniel ii, 37). In the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon we read, 'Hear therefore, O ye kings, and understand, for power is given you of the Lord and sovereignty from the Highest' (Wisdom

<sup>1</sup> *A Monument to St. Augustine*, p. 63. In support of the view that Augustine did intend to deny the possession of justice to the pagan State, cf. his repeated expressions of scorn for the 'justice' of the pagan emperor Julian the Apostate: see e.g. *Contra Litt. Petilian*, ii, §§ 203, 205; *Ep.* 105, § 9.

<sup>2</sup> From 'Sanctity the Token of the Christian Empire,' in *Sermons on Subjects of the Day*, p. 273 (first edition). Cited by Mr. Dawson.

of Solomon vi, 3). Christians remembered that their Master had bidden Peter to take a shekel as tribute and 'give unto them for me and thee' (Matt. xvii, 27): they recalled His words to Pilate, a Roman governor, 'Thou wouldest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above' (John xix, 11). Such texts as these inspired the thought of Paul the Apostle; they lie behind his declaration: 'For there is no power, but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God: and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgement' (Romans xiii, 1-2).<sup>1</sup> In the original intention of God man was not created to exercise domination over man: this is the starting point for Augustine: but that original intention had been thwarted by man's sin: it is this changed condition with which God is faced, and to meet sin coercive government has a place as at once punitive and remedial. As a reaction against sin even the earthly State has a relative justification; it beareth not the sword in vain. Ultimately God's ways are beyond our understanding: He chooses such rulers for man as man deserves. Thus a tyrant, such as Nero, the traditional example of the worst type of ruler, is appointed by divine Providence. Because rulers are chosen by divine Providence, the servants of Christ are bidden to tolerate even the worst and most vicious of States, and that they can do by realising that on earth they are but pilgrims, and that their home is not here but in Heaven. It is not in a pagan State that Christians can expect to find the realisation of their hopes.

The *civitas terrena* is represented by the succession of the empires which dominated the ancient world. Of these Augustine takes two as standing for the series: Assyria, the empire of the East, and its Western successor, Rome. But since the treatment of Rome is much fuller, it will suffice for our present purpose to illustrate the history of the *civitas terrena* by reference to Rome. Sallust, in the introduction to his monograph on the Catilinarian conspiracy, had traced the growth of luxury and the consequent decline of the Roman Republic through the period which followed the Second Punic War. Augustine quotes Sallust at length, but he goes further back in the history for his pessimistic picture of the Roman State. That State was founded, as was Cain's city, on a brother's murder, and no sooner were the early kings of Rome expelled than the patricians began to rule oppressively. The aim of the Roman of the Republican period was glory: glory the Romans most ardently loved, for it they wished to live, for it they did not hesitate to die. Freedom secured by the expulsion of the kings, they sought domination. It was eagerness for praise and desire of fame which led them to perform many wonderful things – things laudable doubtless, and glorious according to human judgment. But these achievements

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Franz Joseph Dölger, 'Zur antiken und frühchristlichen Auffassung der Herrschergewalt von Gottes Gnaden.' *Antike und Christentum*, 3 (1932), 117-127.

were essentially the work of a few virtuous men. These men were granted to Rome by God to achieve His purpose that the empire of Rome should be greater than the empire of Assyria, which it was to supersede. Through this desire for glory the Romans suppressed many other vices: yet since desire for glory is itself a vice, this discipline did not make the Romans holy (*sancti*) but only less base (*minus turpes*). The true aim of virtue is not that we may be seen of men, but that we may glorify our Father who is in Heaven. Yet for their virtues – even though directed to the service of an earthly kingdom – these men who despised their own private affairs for the sake of the Republic, and who for the profit of its treasury resisted avarice, who took counsel for the good of their country in a spirit of freedom – they have received their reward: they imposed the laws of their empire upon many peoples, and at this day, says Augustine, both in literature and history they are glorious among almost all nations. The condemnation of the Roman State lies in the fact that there is no true virtue except that which is directed towards the highest and ultimate good of man. And yet God helped the Romans: *secundum quandam formam terrenae civitatis* – according to the relative standard of the earthly state – they were good men. And in rewarding them God had in view a further purpose – that the Romans might on their own level be an example and an inspiration to the Christians. What did the Romans not despise, what did they not endure, what passions did they not subdue, to win human glory! And shall those who know the meaning of true virtue and serve the true God do less for their higher purpose than did the Romans of the pagan State? Augustine is even prepared to admit that the Roman wars were just, for they were fought in self defence, since their neighbours were less virtuous than they.

There is, I know, another picture of the vices of Rome given in books I to III of the *De Civitate Dei*, where in particular Augustine holds up to reprobation the immoral games celebrated in honour of the Roman gods: but it must be remembered that the unrelieved blackness of that chronicle of successive wars forms part of the apologetic of Augustine – part of his counter-attack against the charges of the pagans, while what perhaps appears to us as a somewhat unbalanced onslaught upon the immorality of the games is inspired by contemporary events – by the fact that many fugitives who had escaped to Africa from the Gothic capture of Rome rushed to the games, forgetting everything else in their passion for these obscene spectacles. That sight had filled Augustine with shame and disgust. It is the vices of the men of his own day which have excited some of the bitterness of the first three books: when he looks back subsequently upon the history of Rome during the early Republican period, when Roman discipline was not yet undermined, he writes, it is true, as a Christian bishop, but also as a Roman who realises what sacrifices went to the building up of the

Roman Empire. Rome is still the representative of the *civitas terrena*: its aims were earthbound, but within those limitations the Romans had proved themselves worthy of an empire.

<sup>1</sup>*Civitas terrena* – *civitas Diaboli* – such is the equation: it has been said by some critics that Augustine in the *De Civitate Dei* not only condemns the pagan State, but condemns every State – the State as such. Now it may be admitted that from a first reading of Augustine's treatise this is a natural conclusion, but it can hardly be doubted that it would be an error. We must always remember that the pagan State is only the representative of – it is not the *same thing* as – the *civitas terrena*, the *civitas Diaboli*: that is a far greater and an invisible society of angels, the dead, the living and those yet to be. In the *De Civitate Dei* Augustine is attacking the pagans, he is criticising the pagan State and the essentially pagan elements in the State of his own day. The Christian State as such does not enter directly into the sphere of discussion. But Augustine's treatment of the State in the *De Civitate Dei* does not exclude a more favourable judgment if the *character* of the State were different from that of pagan Rome. Indeed it may be urged that Augustine refuses to include the concept of justice in his definition of the State because when considering the pagan State he is implicitly contrasting it with his ideal of a Christian State wherein dwelleth justice. He will not extend to *every* State that which is the peculiar prerogative of a Christian kingdom. In Augustine's view, as we have seen, man was fashioned by God as a social creature: the family, united by bonds of love and mutual service, is a natural association: here that passion for domination which has characterised earthly empires is absent. We have further seen that in his own definition of a State which he substitutes for that given by Cicero the test of a State is that its citizens should be united in a common love: if the citizens of a State were to be united, not in a passion for domination, but in a passion for the service of the true God, there is no reason why his judgment upon such a State should not be completely favourable. From his individualistic standpoint, which declines to regard the State as an entity independent of the citizens who compose it, it is the character of those citizens which determines the character of the State.<sup>1</sup> Change the character of the citizens, you change the character of the State, and at the same time you change the character of the judgment to be passed upon it. In Chapter 17 of Book 19 of the *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine says that, while the *civitas terrena* worshipped many Gods, the celestial city knew that one God only was to be worshipped, and thus it has come to pass that the two cities could not have common laws of religion, and that the heavenly city has been compelled in this matter to

<sup>1</sup> 'Perhaps Rome will not perish: perhaps Rome has been scourged but not destroyed. Perchance Rome will not perish if the Romans do not perish. They will not perish if they will praise God: they will only perish if they blaspheme Him: for what is Rome but the Romans?' *Sermo* 81, § 9.

dissent and to become obnoxious to those who think differently and to stand the brunt of their anger and hatred and persecution. That opposition is directed against the religious policy of the pagan State. The *civitas terrena* seeks an earthly peace: the celestial city avails itself of this earthly peace in its pilgrimage towards the heavenly peace. Augustine admits that between the two cities there is a harmony so far as earthly peace is the goal. This harmony on the lower plane does not exclude the possibility that a State could adopt the higher goal. For the statement of Augustine's views upon the justification of a Christian State one must look beyond the *De Civitate Dei* to the writings inspired by his controversy with the Donatists.<sup>1</sup> The Christian empire is the fulfilment of prophecy: it is *secundum prophetiam* that sovereigns are now obedient to the yoke of God, their Lord.<sup>2</sup> It was in the book of Daniel that Augustine found prefigured the great conversion from the pagan to the Christian State: at the first Nebuchadnezzar ordered the just to worship the idol and on their refusal cast them into the fiery furnace: later the same king commanded that any of his subjects who did not worship the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego should suffer death (Daniel iii. 29-30). The first order typifies the period during which apostles and martyrs suffered, the second *significavit tempora posteriorum regum iam fidelium*, under whom it is the impious who suffer.<sup>3</sup> Now kings serve God in fear, when formerly they had taken counsel together against the Lord and against his Christ.<sup>4</sup> Their commands are the commands of Christ,<sup>5</sup> their heart is in the hand of God,<sup>6</sup> they are the children born of the Catholic Church through the Gospel.<sup>7</sup> The kingdoms which put their trust in demons have been overthrown.<sup>8</sup> 'They bear not the sword in vain' – this was not said of any ecclesiastical authority, the sword is not the spiritual punishment of excommunication: this is clear from the context.<sup>9</sup> The sword is the sword of Caesar and Christ had bidden His followers render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. And an emperor, now that he is 'most pious and

<sup>1</sup> I have not cited the *Ad Catholicos epistola contra Donatistas* vulgo *De unitate ecclesiae*, Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 43, coll. 391-446, since its authenticity is doubtful: cf. K. Adam, 'Notizen zur Echtheitsfrage der Augustin zugesprochenen Schrift *De unitate ecclesiae*,' *Theol. Quartalschrift* 91 (1909), 86-115.

<sup>2</sup> *Contra Cresconium* iii. § 51. *Ep.* 105, § 5: The duly appointed powers, quas Deus secundum suam prophetiam subdidit Christo. *Ep.* 93, § 3: giving thanks to God, quod sua pollicitatione completa qua reges terrae Christo servituros esse promisit, sic curavit morbos (cf. *Ps.* lxxi. 11); *Ep.* 87, § 7; *Ep.* 105, § 6; *Ep.* 185, § 20. *Enarratio in Ps. ci: Sermo* ii, § 9. See *Contra Litt. Petilianii* ii, § 211.

<sup>3</sup> *Ep.* 93, § 9; *Ep.* 185, § 19; *Ep.* 105, § 7; *Contra Cresconium* iii, § 56.

<sup>4</sup> *Ps.* ii. 11, contrasted with ii. 2. *Ep.* 93, § 18 *apud inet*; *Ep.* 185, § 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ep.* 105, § 11. 'Hoc iubent imperatores quod iubet et Christus; quia cum bonum iubent, per illos non iubet nisi Christus.' Cf. *Contra Litt. Petilianii* ii, § 132.

<sup>6</sup> *Ep.* 105, § 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ep.* 51, § 3.

<sup>8</sup> 'Regna quae de culturis daemonum praesumebant,' *Ep.* 105, § 15.

<sup>9</sup> *Contra Epist. Parmeniani* i., § 16 (cf. *Ep.* 87, § 7). Here, as elsewhere (cf. e.g. *Ep.* 100, § 1; *Ep.* 134, § 3), Augustine quotes Romans xiii.

most faithful,<sup>1</sup> 'most merciful and most religious,'<sup>2</sup> has his own peculiar function to perform: the service of the ordinary citizen consists in a life lived faithfully, the service of an emperor, which he alone can perform, is to be found in his activity as law-giver, strengthening the good, suppressing idolatry and heresy.<sup>3</sup> And the Church through the scriptures guides the king and counsels him: 'Be ye wise therefore, O ye kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.'<sup>4</sup>

For such a study of the basis of the Christian monarchy the reader will search the *De Civitate Dei* in vain; but in the closing chapters of the fifth book Augustine has set forth wherein consists the happiness of Christian princes. That happiness is to be found in the justice of their rule and in freedom from pride. Their aim must be 'to make their power their trumpeter to divulge the true adoration of God's majesty':<sup>5</sup> their inspirations no desire for empty glory, but a love of eternal felicity.

On the duties of subjects, in his letter to Marcellinus,<sup>6</sup> Augustine wrote, 'Let those who say that the doctrine of Christ is incompatible with the State's well-being give us an army such as the doctrine of Christ requires soldiers to be, let them give us such subjects, such husbands and wives, such parents and children, such masters and servants, such kings, such judges, in fine even such tax-payers and tax-gatherers, as the Christian religion has taught that men should be, and then let them dare to say that it is adverse to the State's well-being! Nay, rather let them no longer hesitate to confess that this doctrine, if it were obeyed, would be the salvation of the State.' And with this compare a passage from the second book of the *De Civitate Dei*:<sup>7</sup> 'If the kings of the earth and all their subjects, if all princes and judges of the earth, if young men and maidens, old and young, every age and both sexes, if they whom the Baptist addressed, the publicans and the soldiers, were all together to hearken to and observe the precepts of the Christian religion regarding just and virtuous conduct, then should the republic adorn the world in this present life with its felicity, and should ascend aloft to reign in bliss through life eternal.'

Thus it was that Augustine constantly sought to influence the magistrates of the empire. Writing to a member of a municipal senate he quotes<sup>8</sup> with approval Cicero's assertion that for good men there can be no limit, no end, to their efforts in the service of their country. In this letter Augustine recurs to the theme of the

<sup>1</sup> *Ep.* 97, § 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ep.* 97, § 3.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 185, §§ 19-20; *Contra Litt. Petiliani* ii., § 210; *Contra Cresconium* iii., § 56.

<sup>4</sup> *Contra Litt. Petiliani*, ii., §§ 210-11 (the lesson from Nebuchadnezzar).

<sup>5</sup> Translation of John Healey.

<sup>6</sup> *Ep.* 138, § 15.

<sup>7</sup> Ch. 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ep.* 91, § 3.

early books of the *De Civitate Dei*: it is paganism and the immoralities of the pagan gods which are the foes of society.<sup>1</sup> Let these follies be done away with, let men be converted to the true worship of God, then you will see your *patria* – your country – flourishing, when this *patria* of the flesh in which you were born has become a portion of that country into which we are born by faith.

At all costs pride and the *cupiditas dominandi* must be banished – that desire for domination which had been the outstanding sin of the pagan empire of Rome. It is thus that Augustine is led to profess his own preference for a number of small states living in peace with each other rather than for a single great empire. Law for Augustine, has its basis in the consent of the governed: his small states would be like large human families. 'It is always,' Figgis remarks, 'on the analogy of the family that Augustine thinks.'

In the *De Civitate Dei* Augustine has not propounded a theory of the Christian State, but neither did he condemn the State as such, nor exclude the possibility of a State raised upon a Christian basis.

From the *civitas terrena* we turn to the *civitas Dei*: from the State to the Church. Now it is undoubted that at times Augustine does identify the Church with the *civitas Dei*, but fundamentally the latter is more than that and at the same time less than that. It is the communion of saints, while there are in the visible Church many who are not of the number. The Church is the body of those who are on the way to the celestial city, it is 'the organ and representative in the world of the eternal City of God' (Dawson). It is universal – the Catholic Church – not restricted to one province of the Empire, as was, almost exclusively, the Donatist church. It was through the Church that grace was mediated. As Figgis says, for Augustine 'the Church, the visible Church, recruited by baptism, nourished by sacraments, governed by bishops, was the one true family of God, and Christianity meant belonging to that family,'<sup>2</sup> while here and now it is the Millennial Kingdom of God of the Book of Revelation. The Second Coming of Christ is the Church. Between the visible Church and the earthly State what should be the relations? Now it is important to remember that the *De Civitate Dei* is not directly concerned with this problem, and that here again Augustine never formulated a complete theory of that relation. The theory which the Middle Ages developed *may* be deduced from Augustine's writings: our task is rather to enquire what Augustine himself thought. The spheres of Church and State are distinct and different, but that distinction could not be maintained completely, for the State had since the reign of Constantine called in the Church to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, § 3. 'Nihil enim homines tam insociabiles reddit vitæ perversitate quam . . . deorum imitatio.'

<sup>2</sup> The Church 'is the point at which the transcendent spiritual order inserts itself into the sensible world, the one bridge by which the creature can pass from Time to Eternity' (Dawson).



aid it in its civil administration: in particular it had entrusted the Church with the protection and the education of orphans. It had imposed upon the Church the ungrateful duty of settling civil disputes in ecclesiastical courts: it had even appointed bishops as 'defenders' of cities to control the administration of its own officials – a difficult and burdensome responsibility. 'We do not want to have dealings with the powers that be' (*Sermo* 302, § 19), said Augustine once, when wearied with tasks which took him away from his true work. The Church, on its side, claims that the State should do all in its power to favour the worship of the true God: Augustine approves and justifies the suppression by the State of pagan rites; it is the duty of the Church to decide what that true faith is which the State must defend. At the same time, so long as their faith is not violated, Christians must obey the laws and pay the taxes of the State: they must render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's. Here the freedom of the State is unrestricted, and we have already seen that Augustine is prepared to carry the duty of a subject's obedience to great lengths. But the crucial issue in any consideration of the relation of Church and State lay in the question whether it was the duty of the State to persecute heretics and schismatics. In his early controversy with the Manichaeans Augustine answered unequivocally in the negative: the State could not force the free will of man in matters of belief. And this was at first his attitude in the Donatist controversy:<sup>1</sup> it is extremely interesting to watch through a detailed study of his writings his gradual change of view. At the last he came to think that it was not so much the State which had a right to persecute the Donatists as that the Church had a right to demand this service of the State. Yet the very length and elaboration of Augustine's pleas in defence of the use of force would suggest that he was seeking to persuade *himself* that such persecution was justified. 'Compel them to come in': it has proved a fatal text in the history of the Church. It is not pleasant to think of Augustine as the spiritual father of the Inquisition.

Church and State for Augustine have their independent spheres of action: true: but through his other-worldly conception of human history it is to the Church that the primacy belongs, and he is mainly concerned with the State as the handmaid of the Church in religious matters.

Augustine is in his political theory, I would repeat, no systematic philosopher: he is never rigorously consistent: you cannot construct from his writings a single water-tight conception either of State or Church. As the particular need of the moment called for his intervention, so he wrote. Alaric captured Rome and that fall of Rome was charged against the Christians: Augustine replied by an attack upon the pagan State. The Donatists

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 23, § 7. 'Intellegant non hoc esse propositi mei ut inviti homines ad cuiusquam communionem cogantur. . . . Re agamus, ratione agamus.'

urged against the Catholics the latter's alliance with the Roman emperors: Augustine defends that alliance, and contends that emperors, because they have the resources of the Empire behind them, can serve God in a way in which private citizens cannot serve Him. Thus the reader who seeks for Augustine's view *as a whole* on any particular subject is embarrassed and finds himself at a loss. Augustine throws off in the course of an argument striking phrases, and, tearing them from their context, men have read *out of* them or, if you prefer it read *into them*, complete theories which *in that form* are something other than the thought of Augustine. The Church, said Augustine, is here and now the Millennial Kingdom: he was contending against those who sought to date in the near future the Second Coming of Christ. If this be true, argued later thinkers, the earthly head of that kingdom must have royal powers: and thence may be derived the claims of the medieval Papacy. But the medieval Papacy is not in Augustine. The State, if it is to be based on justice, must acknowledge the worship of the true God. You can argue that since the Church is the guardian of the true faith, the State is therefore subject to the Church. But Augustine proclaimed the independence within its own sphere of the earthly State. It is all too easy to make Augustine responsible for views which others have deduced from his work.

But if, in closing, we look on Augustine's thought of the State, we shall notice in particular that for him man is essentially a social creature, so formed by God: and since all men come ultimately from a single pair, Adam and Eve, *all* men are by that fact united in common ties. For Augustine there can be no Aryan clause: there are no pariahs, for all men have a common source and a single Father in Heaven.

And again, just because Augustine himself had experienced what it was to know the right and to be unable to *will* the right, *will* is the paramount factor in human life. The last word is not with the *mind*, but with the emotions – with what one *loves*. To Augustine forms of government are really irrelevant: the character of the State is determined by the character of the citizens who compose the State. The two great *civitates* of Augustine's vision are distinguished by two *loves*: 'Two *loves* formed two cities' – love of self leading to contempt of God – love of God leading to contempt of self. 'A State is an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement *concerning the objects of their love*.' If you would achieve, it is not enough to *know*: knowledge must be reinforced by passion. And human history has a meaning because it forms part of a great plan which was conceived when time was not – for time and creation began together – and shall be consummated when time is no more. Human history is not, as Stoics thought, a cyclic recurrence: human history has a goal. That is the thought which lies at the heart of the *De Civitate Dei*.

And for this very reason the only State which is truly eternal is the kingdom in which Christ reigns supreme. For Augustine Rome is not the eternal city. 'The things which God Himself has made will pass away, how much sooner that which Romulus founded.' Augustine could look beyond the fall of Rome – the centre and source of the civilisation of his day – because there was a *civitas* which was greater than any earthly state: the *civitas Dei* remained. That is the victory of faith, and it was this supreme confidence which enabled the Church to fulfil its mission to the barbarian conquerors of Rome when at length the empire of Rome in the west of Europe was but a memory – the memory of a lost unity which haunted the dreams of men in Europe's middle age.

(N.B.—The publication of a pamphlet by the Historical Association does not necessarily imply the Association's official approbation of the opinions expressed therein.)

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